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RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2097
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH 1753
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0868
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0362
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENTIANE 000413

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2016

TAGS: [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [LA](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RAISES HMONG MASSACRE WITH VIENTIANE
GOVERNOR

REF: A. VIENTIANE 390

[1](#)B. VIENTIANE 405

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia M. Haslach, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Amnesty International has issued a statement condemning the April 6 killing by Lao soldiers of Hmong civilians in northern Vientiane province (ref A). Ambassador called on Vientiane province's Governor May 4 to discuss the killing; the Governor professed ignorance of the event but at least didn't dismiss it out of hand, instead promising to look into the report. Meanwhile, to keep the aid flowing, the Lao paid lip service to human rights. The latest iteration: UNDP's "Rights-Based Approach to Development," which the GoL has endorsed even as it ignores egregious human rights violations on the ground. End summary.

AI's statement

[1](#)2. (C) AI issued a statement May 4 strongly condemning the April 6 massacre of ethnic Hmong civilians in northern Vientiane province. Detailing what is known of the massacre (26 dead, almost all of whom were women and children and all of whom were allegedly unarmed), the report also noted the continued detention by the Lao of 27 Hmong deported from Thailand in December, and concluded with a hard-hitting critique of the GoL's handling of the Hmong issue. AI called on the government to launch a prompt inquiry into the April 6 massacre in order to bring those responsible to justice, and also urged the immediate release of the detained Hmong to allow them to rejoin their families in Thailand.

Meeting with Vientiane governor

[1](#)3. (C) Also on May 4, Ambassador traveled to Vientiane province's provincial office to meet with Governor Somphet Thipmala about the massacre. Somphet took over the Vientiane portfolio at the beginning of this year, after having overseen the Saisomboun Special Zone for over a decade, until its dissolution in late 2005. With most of Saisomboun now melded into Vientiane, he continues to reign over the areas of the former Saisomboun where insurgents are active. He had allowed the Ambassador to visit Long Cheng, the old "Secret War" airbase -- the first visit by an official American since [1](#)1975.

[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador raised the massacre in the course of a meeting we billed as a courtesy call on the newly-appointed

governor. She described the circumstances of the massacre, gave its rough location (along with a map) and stressed that our objective in raising the case was not to embarrass the government but to encourage an impartial investigation of the incident and to punish those found responsible. She also urged the Governor, who has experience with resettlement, to peacefully resettle Hmong "remote people" coming out of the forest, and repeated the offer of international assistance to new settlers. The Governor convincingly professed complete ignorance of the event, saying he had heard of nothing unusual happening in the province in January, beyond the death of a Canadian citizen of a drug overdose in Vang Vieng. However, he did not dismiss the report out of hand as we had expected, but promised to look into it and inform MFA of the results.

Rights-based approach to development

15. (C) While they blithely ignore our many approaches on specific concerns like the massacre, the Lao government talks a good game about respect for human rights. The UN has recently introduced a "Rights-Based Approach to Development" to its development program, intending to include human rights components (i.e. ensuring respect for UN conventions) in future projects. While selling the Lao on the idea was somewhat contentious, the GoL has in theory bought off on the rights-based approach in principle. Last week UNDP and MFA jointly hosted a workshop on the new approach, designed to explain to government officials involved in development work how to include human rights components in their planning. A UNICEF representative in a donor meeting today, however, noted that in the UN's last joint document with the GOL, the GOL insisted in the end that the word "rights" be removed in

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every instance it occurred.

Comment

16. (C) AI's statement on the massacre will focus more attention on the incident, which will get the wheels moving within the Lao bureaucracy to counter the story. That's already happening: our Australian colleagues, doing a round with MFA's Human Rights Department today, said the MFA flatly denied any reports originating from outside the country of human rights problems. Only reports "from the Lao people" were deemed worthy of investigation. We won't hear anything from the GoL other than flat denials of the incident, but the attention may at least generate some momentum within their system to look into the report and with any luck put the spotlight on those guilty of the massacre.

17. (C) We support the UNDP's effort to incorporate a Rights-based approach to development in its program. By inches the Lao are being moved in the right direction in regard to giving attention to human rights. But in view of recent egregious human rights violations -- the detention of 27 Hmong by Lao authorities, a new bout of religious intolerance, and now this massacre -- it is hard not to conclude that the government is paying anything but lip service to human rights to mollify the international community in order to keep the aid flowing (see Ref B). End comment.

HASLACH